

American

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NATO, European Summits to Seek Answers to Global Challenges

By Merle David Kellerhals Jr.
Staff Writer

Washington — President Obama arrives in Lisbon, Portugal, for two days of meetings starting November 19, with an agenda that includes demonstrating the central role of the United States' relationship with Europe and the U.S.-European capability to meet global challenges.

Obama will be attending the 2010 NATO Summit and the U.S.-European Union Summit in Lisbon November 19-20.

"These summits are an opportunity to strengthen our relationship with our European allies and partners, which is a cornerstone of our engagement with the world," says Assistant Secretary of State Philip Gordon.

At the top of the NATO agenda is a plan to begin the gradual phase out of U.S. forces and the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan beginning next year, with a complete turnover of the security mission to the Afghanistan national army and police by 2014.

The 28-nation alliance will also approve a new Strategic Concept that forms the blueprint for future NATO operations in its traditional trans-Atlantic region and elsewhere. NATO leaders also are expected to discuss plans for a limited missile defense system for Europe.

"The new Strategic Concept will be the first in 11 years, and it will chart the future course of the alliance as it prepares to meet new threats," Gordon said.

Obama also will participate in a meeting of the 49 nations contributing troops to Afghanistan through ISAF and major economic-assistance donors, Gordon said.

Russian President Dmitry Medvedev will join Obama and other NATO leaders for a meeting of the NATO-Russia Council, he said.

At the conclusion of the NATO Summit on November 20, Obama will join European Commission President José Manuel Barroso and European Council President Herman van Rompuy for the 2010 U.S.-EU Summit, Gordon said. The summit will focus on three areas of concern: the still-recovering world economy, security and counterterrorism cooperation, and global issues such as Iran, the Middle East peace process and Afghanistan.

At a Washington Foreign Press Center briefing November 17, Gordon said the meetings demonstrate the critical role

that the United States, NATO and the EU play in working together to promote shared foreign affairs objectives in a wide range of security, economic and human rights issues.

When the previous Strategic Concept was adopted at the 1999 Washington Summit on the alliance's 50th anniversary, terrorism had not become the global threat that it presents today and NATO had not fully embraced significant operations outside of Europe.

On Afghanistan, Gordon said the ISAF countries and economic donors will focus on "a responsible transition" to turn over the lead responsibility for security to Afghanistan. Gordon stressed that the transition process will unfold based on conditions in the country, not in faraway capitals, and it will include progress in training Afghan forces. During the transition, there also will be security assessments by Afghan and international experts.

"Transition will not happen overnight, it's not a single event, and it will not be a rush for the exit," he added.

The goal of the NATO-Russia Council meeting is to enhance an already existing relationship that seeks to improve mutual security, Gordon said. In the past two decades, the relationship between Russia (and the former Soviet Union) and the NATO alliance has changed radically, he said.

U.S. Fight Against Haitian Cholera Focused on Prevention

By Stephen Kaufman
Staff Writer

Washington — U.S. officials promised an "aggressive campaign" to help Haitian authorities fight the spread of cholera in their country through prevention techniques such as providing clean, chlorinated drinking water, oral rehydration therapy, education and additional funding to expand cholera treatment centers.

Speaking in Washington November 18, Mark Ward, the acting director of the Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), said U.S. authorities have "a lot of confidence" in the Haitian government's response to the outbreak and in the professionalism of Haitian medical personnel.

"The government response has been very good, very strong," Ward said. "The Ministry of Health responded immediately. They asked us to set up treatment centers in Port-au-Prince and they identified the sites rapidly. ... President [René] Préval has gone around the country telling people ... to take steps [and] to seek treatment."

Ward said the Obama administration has “an aggressive plan on prevention” to combat the disease, saying cholera “is not very hard to prevent or treat if you get it early. But we’ve got to provide the tools to treat it, and make sure the people know how to use those tools and take better care of themselves.”

The United States is sending chlorine for water treatment, millions of Aquatubs that can clean water, and 2 million oral rehydration sachets. It has also provided enough hygiene kits to support 80,000 people for two weeks and U.S. relief personnel are distributing them “as fast as we can,” he said.

It will also be adding additional funds to expand treatment facilities around the country, he said.

Ward reported that there are now more than 18,000 cases of cholera and more than 1,100 deaths due to the outbreak, which began October 20. OFDA has committed about \$9 million to fight the disease and “that number is going up every day,” he said.

Dr. Manoj Menon, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention’s liaison to USAID for the Haiti cholera response, said that because of population movements in and out of Haiti, “we’ll never know how the strain arrived” in the country. The disease was first confirmed on October 20. The displacement of millions of Haitians following the January 12 earthquake contributed to the outbreak, as did a break in Haiti’s water system, he said.

“We suspect that Haiti is going to have sustained transmission for a number of years. We hope that, given the preventive and treatment measures that we have ... the biggest burden will be early on in the epidemic, and that’s what we’re seeing now,” Menon said.

Asian Water Supplies at Risk, Report Says

By Karin Rives
Staff Writer

Washington — A concerted effort is needed to secure water and food supplies for people living in the greater Himalayas area, says a new report from the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID).

Climate change threatens to further squeeze resources in the heavily populated region. Because glaciers are retreating at a slow pace, however, development agencies and nations in the region have time to help communities prepare for the changes, according to *Changing Glaciers and Hydrology in Asia: Addressing Vulnerability to Glacier Melt Impacts*.

The report, presented this week in Washington, outlines steps that USAID can take in conjunction with local and

national governments to help protect water supplies, reduce pollution that accelerates glacier melt and strengthen families and communities.

Scientists caution that long-term scientific data for many of the region’s glaciers still don’t exist, but say there is ample evidence that many glaciers at lower elevations are retreating. That means already-scarce water supplies needed to sustain crops and growing populations will decrease, authors of the report said.

“We wanted to get ahead of the curve instead of always reacting,” said Mary Melnyk, a senior natural resource management adviser for USAID’s Asia and Middle East bureaus. “We wanted to begin preparing and being proactive on environmental issues. The time to act is now.”

The region covered in the report includes nine major river basins and mountain ranges in India, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and several other countries. It’s a large part of the world with diverse weather and climate conditions and a population of nearly 2 billion people.

DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS SHOULD INTERSECT

Tackling water scarcity in the greater Himalayas area will require a new and cross-disciplinary approach by development agencies such as USAID, as well as a new level of cooperation among nations that depend on the glaciers for water, the report says.

“Climate change in general, and glacier melt specifically, can potentially impact all sectors — economic growth, government, health,” Melnyk said. “Addressing the impact of climate change and other environmental security issues still [is] not a part of our day-to-day business across these different sectors, so this report tries to push the envelope on that. All sectors need to be involved.”

Replacing primitive cookstoves that generate soot known to accelerate glacier melt should be one priority, the report says. The United States recently teamed up with the United Nations Foundation and a number of other countries to get 100 million homes worldwide to upgrade to better stoves by 2020.

Another priority for USAID in the greater Himalayas region, according to the report, should be to integrate family planning and other health services into community-based climate adaptation programs. Current population growth is not sustainable, said Kristina Yarrow, a health adviser in USAID’s Asia and Middle East bureaus who worked on the report.

“Population growth, which can be changed by the use of family planning, impacts glacier melt indirectly through the consumption and use of resources that exacerbate warming and black carbon.”

“Finding innovative ways to improve access to family planning — and to integrate family planning messages and services about healthy timing and spacing of pregnancy into adaptation programs — will prove to yield some very important co-benefits,” she said.

USAID’s already-robust family planning programs should be strengthened in areas vulnerable to glacier melts, such as the Ganges and Indus river basins, Yarrow said.

Nearly 500 million people live within the Ganges basin and more than 200 million within the Indus. Close to one-third of the water in the Indus River comes from glacier melt. Water scarcity in the heavily irrigated river basin is already a challenge for people living there, the report says.

Exhibition Showcases Spanish Connections in New York History

By Karen Calabria
Special Correspondent

New York — When Jan Rodrigues arrived in New York in 1613, he carried with him 80 hatchets and little else. He hoped to do brisk trade with the natives for beaver pelts he could sell to European aristocrats.

Rodrigues, from St. Domingo (now the Dominican Republic), was the first documented non-native resident in New York, more than a decade before the Dutch arrived to claim it as New Amsterdam in 1625. He was a free black man attempting to make his way in the world, and his arrival marked the beginning of a long and fruitful relationship between New York and the Spanish-speaking world.

This fall, the exhibition *Nueva York (1613–1945)* attempts to recover that history, documenting four centuries of cross-cultural influence and cooperation. “You can’t tell the history of New York properly unless you take into account its relationship with the Spanish-speaking world,” said exhibition curator Marci Reaven.

To tell that part of history, El Museo del Barrio teamed with the home of the city’s oldest museum and research library, the New-York Historical Society, to present *Nueva York (1613–1945)*. The exhibition coincides with bicentennial celebrations in the many Latin American countries that gained independence from Spain in 1810.

“This was a timely opportunity to both uncover and

reinforce the connection between Latin America and Spain and New York. We’d like to introduce the idea that Spanish speakers have been in New York for centuries, not just decades. They aren’t a new presence,” Reaven told *America.gov*.

For years, the connections have been relegated to the margins of New York’s historical records, according to New-York Historical Society President Louise Mirrer.

“People tend to look at immigration in one direction — east to west. We never tend to look south. When we do, we have a very different picture of the history of this city,” she said.

With art, artifacts and original documents, *Nueva York* chronicles the legacy of Latin influence on New York life, from commerce to religion. “There’s practically a piece of Latino or Hispanic history in every aspect of the city,” said Elvis Fuentes, curator at El Museo del Barrio.

Fuentes points out the Hispanic influence on one of New Yorkers’ favorite pastimes: baseball.

When Esteban Bellán arrived in New York in 1863 from his native Havana, Cuba, he had never seen a baseball bat. But that didn’t stop him from surpassing his schoolmates and taking the nascent sport by storm. Bellán was the first Latin American ballplayer to play professionally, with the Troy Haymakers, in 1869. Upon retiring in 1874, he returned to Cuba and spread the gospel of American baseball, paving the way for modern greats like Minnie Minoso and Tony Perez.

The stories of ballplayer Bellán and trader Rodrigues offer Americans of Latino and Hispanic origin understanding of the legacies of their predecessors.

The exhibition sponsors attempted to balance art and history by commissioning filmmaker Ric Burns to produce a half-hour documentary on the Latino presence in New York since 1945. The film, shown at the exhibition’s conclusion, is meant as a natural continuation of the story of Latino New York. It features such luminaries as Public Broadcasting Service news correspondent Ray Suarez and the first Latino Pulitzer Prize winner for fiction, author Oscar Hijuelos.

Organizers hope the exhibition will usher in a new wave of research among historians.

Museum-goer Manuel Rodrigues, a Cuba native who has spent most of his 66 years in New York, is hopeful as well. “Museums in general are so very Euro-centric. They don’t exhibit the contribution of other cultures very much. An exhibit like this is important not only to Latinos, but every New Yorker, every American. It provides a broader,

better history.”

Hispanics account for 27 percent of New York City’s 8.2 million residents, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Nationwide, Hispanics make up 15 percent of the population.

Nueva York (1613–1945) will be on display at El Museo del Barrio, 1230 Fifth Avenue at 104th Street, through January 9, 2011.

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